

Testimony of Dan Bolognani  
Board Chair, Western CT Tourism District

Dear Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Tourism is a multi faceted industry. Our State is blessed with diversity making the role of the Tourism Districts critical in branding the Regions that compose Connecticut. I am here on behalf of the Western CT Tourism Region to ask that Regional Tourism Districts be funded at appropriate levels of 2 million per region leaving 9 million for state marketing.

Each Tourism Region brings many assets to the table. The Western Connecticut Convention and Visitors Bureau offers five important assets that have been developed, expanded and continually refined over the past 30 years that are integral to tourism marketing in the state.

1. History – We are proud of our 25 year history of a public private partnership with nearly 500 businesses and attractions that contribute marketing dollars to the organization in order to leverage state funds.
2. Public Relations - We are proud that the Western Tourism District has a proven national public relations program. The advertising dollar amount of the Bureau's national publicity is approximately 5 to 6 million dollars a year. This type of third party endorsed publicity cannot be bought – it takes a network of contacts and professionals that know their region well and are able to give the media the right hook in order to get the story.
3. Network- We are proud of the vast network of travel trade contacts from meeting planners to group tour operators that we have relationships with. Leads are amassed and distributed to properties and attractions in order to help them generate their meeting and group businesses that is the life blood of hotels and attractions of all sizes.
4. Research. We are proud that Western Connecticut measures the economic impact of special events of all kinds from the Norwalk Oyster Festival, Civil War Reenactments to the Litchfield House Tour and Salisbury Ski Jumps, to assist event organizers expand events and solicit sponsors. Research is a key element in planning for and expanding a regions tourism product.
- 5, WEBSITE: We are proud our Website and Social Media work has resulted in a vast treasure trove of intellectual property for the Western Tourism District. Western Connecticut's website is rich in content with listings that go into the year 2012. Driving, hiking, biking, and boating tours have been developed and can be downloaded on handheld devices. Hundreds of travel writers, the traveling public and in and out of state residents follow the Bureau's three blogs, facebook page and twitter accounts that are maintained and refreshed on a daily basis.

On behalf of the Western CT Convention and Visitors Bureau, I respectfully ask that the Regional Tourism Districts be funded at two million dollars each. The two tier system of state and regions works and is the cornerstone of all tourism programs in the United States. Connecticut's Region have a thirty year proven track record...something that the State Legislature has supported and funded and should be proud of too.